



Everything New Orleans

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Digital complex proposed for N.O.

Theme park, studio would be included

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BATON ROUGE -- The Santa Monica, Calif., company that developed and produced two Mortal Kombat movies and television series is looking to develop a digital theme park in the New Orleans area, Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu said Monday.

Landrieu, fresh from a trip to Los Angeles and a round of meetings with executives of the film industry and the 2,500-member Producers Guild of America, said Threshold Entertainment Chief Executive Larry Kasanoff has spoken to him twice about the proposal.

"He wants to bring a \$150 million digital theme park coupled with a sound stage" and studio to the state, Landrieu said. He said the park would cover an estimated 100,000 square feet of riverfront property in the New Orleans area. He did not disclose a location.

"He wants to make it happen," Landrieu said.

Although there were no specifics, such a digital theme park could include rides and attractions with an emphasis on digital special effects, something like the Space Mountain attraction at Disneyland.

A sound stage would be important to help the state in luring more movie and television production. A good deal of movie and television filming is done on sound stages, particularly for indoor shots.

A different announcement is scheduled for this morning in which a studio owner wants to build a studio complex in the Algiers area. It was unclear Monday evening how that announcement could affect Kasanoff's notion.

Kasanoff confirmed that his company is interested in locating a digital theme park "in the middle of downtown New Orleans" where it could "attract millions of visitors."

He said there is no timetable on when a decision will be made on the project. He said if it is built, it will be a state-of-the-art studio-theme park-sound stage worth more than \$100 million.

Kasanoff described the project as "an extraordinary opportunity. . . . It is an idea we are prepared to do."

Landrieu called his talks with company executives "very significant." He said he wants to get the city and the Port of New Orleans involved in the talks.

"His primary interest is in New Orleans," Landrieu said, "but Baton Rouge is one of the places" also being considered.

"I want to visit with the mayors of Baton Rouge and New Orleans and the governor" to work together on this, Landrieu said.

The company has done digital special effects for music videos, movies, television shows and businesses, according to its Web site. Some of the company's clients are Disney, Fox, Paramount Studios, DreamWorks, Miramax and Nickelodeon.

The company's research laboratory also has come up with some of the special effects used in theme parks operated by Walt Disney Co., Busch SeaWorld and Paramount Parks, according to its Web site.

"I have always been a skeptic about people bearing gifts," Landrieu said. "But they have the ability to make this work."

He also said that the FX network will be shooting a five-episode series titled "Thief" in the New Orleans area later this year. He said it could grow beyond the five shows, depending on how well it is received.

Executives at Sony Corp., which filmed "All the King's Men" in Louisiana earlier this year, also expressed an interest in the state's new music and recording tax incentives.

Landrieu said his West Coast jaunt was designed to "reconnect with our business partners" in the industry and allay fears that the state has curtailed its movie tax credits. At the recent legislative session, lawmakers increased the tax breaks for filmmakers and TV producers but made the breaks apply only to work done in Louisiana and not post-production work done outside of the state.

"They didn't know what was going to happen" when the session opened, Landrieu said of the producers. "They seemed comfortable with the way the legislation turned out."

Landrieu said that the state still must focus on training workers for the movie, television, music production and video game industries. "Training, training and training is the message I came back with," Landrieu said.

"Our competition is not Mississippi and New Mexico," he said. "It is Canada and New Zealand and Great Britain."

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